

Message Text

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SUBJECT: SIBIR PUT INTO OPERATION BETWEEN MURMANSK AND
YAMAL PENINSULA

REF: MOSCOW 12193

1. ACCORDING TO RECENT PRESS ACCOUNT, THE NEWLY COMMISSIONED SOVIET NUCLEAR-POWERED ICEBREAKER "SIBIR" HAS BEEN PUT INTO ACTIVE SERVICE ON THE SUPPLY ROUTE TO THE YAMAL PENINSULA. AS EARLIER REPORTED (REFTEL), ADDITION THIS ICEBREAKER WILL SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASE THE ABILITY OF THE SOVIETS TO MOVE LARGE AMOUNTS OF MATERIAL TO THE GAS AND OIL FIELDS BEING OPENED ON THE YAMAL PENINSULA AND ALONG THE SOVIET ARCTIC OCEAN LITTORAL.

2. LENINGRADSKAYA PRAVDA ON FEBRUARY 16 REPORTED THAT "SIBIR," "KAPITAN SOROKIN" (A CONVENTIONAL ICEBREAKER) AND DIESEL SHIP "NAVARIN" LEFT MURMANSK ON THAT DATE FOR THE YAMAL PENINSULA. THE SHIPS WERE TO BE FOLLOWED "SEVERAL DAYS LATER" BY CONVOY OF SEVEN VESSELS LED BY SECOND NUCLEAR-POWERED ICEBREAKER "LENIN." THE ARTICLE CONTAINS FEBRUARY 15 INTERVIEW WITH ONE OF DIRECTORS OF ICEBREAKER SERVICE OF MURMANSK STEAMSHIP COMPANY, GRIGORIY YAKOVLEVICH

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KRASNOPOL'SKIY, WHO HIGHLIGHTED FOLLOWING ASPECTS OF VOYAGE:

-- MAIN PURPOSE IS SAME AS TWO PREVIOUS VOYAGES IN 1976 AND 1977 (WITHOUT "SIBIR") NAMELY TO DELIVER EQUIPMENT, MACHINERY, FUEL, METAL FABRICATIONS AND WHATEVER ELSE IS NEEDED BY GEOLOGISTS AND GAS AND OIL INDUSTRY WORKERS FOR SUCCESSFUL EXPLOITATION OF AREA'S GAS AND OIL DEPOSITS.

-- HOWEVER, FOR FIRST TIME, SUPPLY CONVOY WILL BE LED BY TWO NUCLEAR-POWERED ICEBREAKERS WORKING TOGETHER -- "SIBIR" AND "LENIN," WITH HELP OF THIRD CONVENTIONAL DIESEL-ELECTRIC ICEBREAKER. IN ADDITION, CONVOY IS "CONSIDERABLY LARGER" THAN ANY PREVIOUS AND INCLUDES 15,000 TON SOVIET TANKER SAMBURG. AMOUNT OF CARGO IS DOUBLE THAT OF LAST YEAR (NO TONNAGE FIGURES GIVEN). THIS DICTATES HASTE SINCE BEGINNING OF YAMAL PENINSULA ICE THAW IN SECOND HALF OF APRIL MAKES UNLOADING AFTER THAT TIME "DANGEROUS."

-- "MOST COMPLICATED" ASPECT OF VOYAGE IS GIVEN AS OPENING OF "MULTI-MILE CANALS" IN SHORE ICE TO UNLOADING POINTS. SPECIALISTS CURRENTLY REPORTED TO BE CONTINUOUSLY TESTING ICE THICKNESS TO DETERMINE BEST UNLOADING AREAS. ICE MORAGES EXPECTED TO BE 7-8 KM FROM SHORE, AND TRUCK ROUTES NOW BEING BUILD OVER ICE TO HANDLE ONWARD TRANSPORTATION OF CARGOES.

3. WHILE FOCUSSING ON "SIBIR," LP ARTICLE PLAYS UP RECENT SOVIET ICEBREAKER SUCCESSES INCLUDING BREAKTHROUGH OF NUCLEAR-POWERED ICEBREAKER "ARKTIKA" TO NORTH POLE AND WINTER VOYAGES MURMANSK-DUDINKA AND MURMANSK-YAMAL PENINSULA. IT LINKS THESE TO CONCERTED SOVIET EFFORT SPEED UP DEVELOPMENT OF AREA'S NATURAL RESOURCES BASED ON SUPPORT- LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ING INFRASTRUCTURE OF FACTORIES AND CITIES BUILT UP IN SOVIET ARCTIC IN RECENT YEARS. ARTICLE CLAIMS THAT WITH ADDITION "SIBIR" AREA NOW IS ON VERGE OF REALIZING "DREAM" OF YEAR-ROUND NAVIGATION. BUCHANAN

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